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June 9, 1998

Harold Varmus, MD
Director
National Institutes of Health
Building 1
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Varmus:

It was with dismay that I noted Dr. Collins' remarks today in the article of the "Health and Behavior" section of the USA Today discussing the Human Genome Project and my new joint venture with Perkin-Elmer. Clearly, there is a legitimate discussion to be had regarding the science involved in undertaking this new venture for sequencing the human genome relative to the approach taken by the federal government. However, I believe that the quotes attributed to Dr. Collins in this article go far beyond legitimate scientific debate and take on a significantly more personal tone.

Prior to the announcement of this new venture I approached you, Dr. Klausner, and Dr. Collins in order to cooperate with and not detract from ongoing NIH research activities, and indicate the complementary nature of our venture. I felt at that time you recognized the small possibility for negative impact on federally funded human genome efforts, but you also recognized the long run benefits of this project for all involved in research for human health and were generally supportive. Your comments at the press briefing reinforced this notion. The message from that briefing was that this new private venture has proposed undertaking a significant scientific project that needs to be validated and that until that occurs it is prudent for federal efforts to maintain their current activities.

In the time since that announcement there have been numerous articles discussing this project and in each of them, if asked, I have only tried to support the federally-funded effort, identify the ways in which the two programs will be complementary and indicate that funding for that project should continue. Yet, in spite of these cooperative remarks I find that prior to even generating the first DNA sequence of this project, I am accused of generating the "Mad Magazine" version of the human genome and generating a "sloppy draft" of the complete sequence by Dr. Collins. As you can imagine, this certainly pushes the limits of working cooperatively.

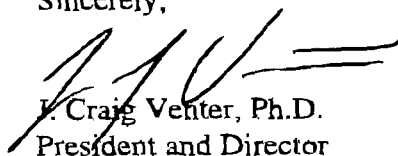
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I am receiving numerous calls daily for more interviews, and have recently been invited to testify before the House Science Committee to discuss the impact of this new program on federal initiatives. There is a legitimate scientific discussion to be had on this topic and I hope to try and provide information that will allow this discussion to occur.

Now is the time to help Congress, industry, and society understand the impact that genomics will have in improving human health, and to secure even more funding for ground-breaking research activities from both the public and private sectors. I hope that we can continue to work together to achieve this objective. Unfortunately, comments like those of Dr. Collins only serve to fuel a controversy that is not constructive for anyone or any organization.

Sincerely,



J. Craig Venter, Ph.D.
President and Director